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LIBYA

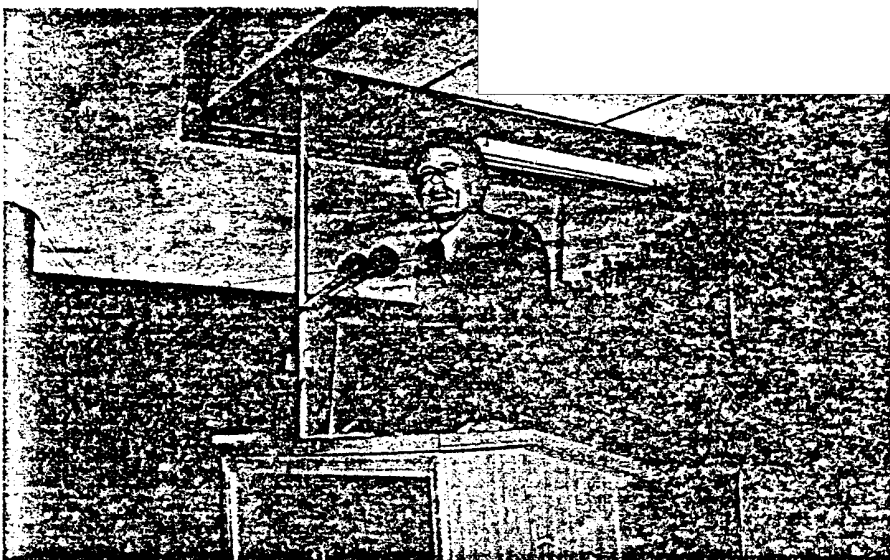
Thriving on Trouble

*Gaddafi calmly steers a
tempestuous course*

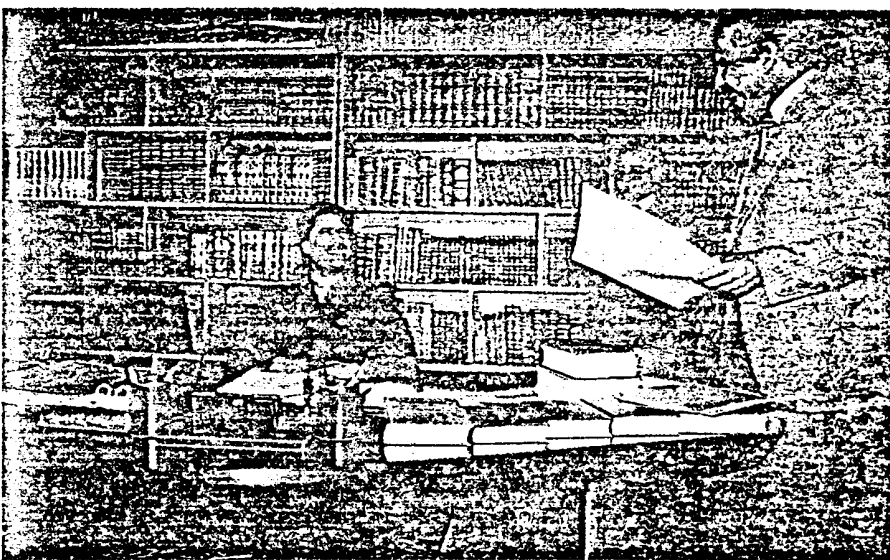
Colonel Muammar Gaddafi could not have appeared more at ease last week as he sipped orange soda in an official guest house during a one-hour interview with TIME Diplomatic Correspondent Strobe Talbott in the central Libyan desert city of Sebha. Indeed, the mercurial strongman's imperturbability seemed to be in almost studied contrast to the erratic policies that have increasingly made Libya a focal point of international controversy and contention. Only hours after the interview, Israel charged that Libyan-operated SA-9 missiles had been fired at Israeli reconnaissance planes from Palestinian positions in southern Lebanon (*see preceding story*). In the U.S. three weeks earlier, the Reagan Administration had expelled 27 Libyan diplomats in protest against what Washington regards as Gaddafi's outrageous policy of bankrolling terrorist activities around the world. In the Central African country of Chad, meanwhile, 4,000 Libyan troops served as a virtual occupation force five months after Gaddafi's military intervention in support of President Goukouni Oueddei in that country's civil war. This was exactly the sort of move that has enraged Gaddafi's neighbors—especially Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, who has called the Libyan leader "a vicious criminal, 100% sick and possessed of a demon."

Other Arab leaders are also alarmed by Gaddafi's revolutionary proclivities and criticize him for siding with Iran in its war against Iraq. Even Libya's Soviet backers view Gaddafi with suspicion, notably for his way of soliciting their support while keeping them at arm's length. Sums up a Palestinian political observer in Beirut: "If you measure a man by his enemies, Gaddafi has great stature."

Recently Gaddafi has had to contend with increasing opposition to his regime among Libyans studying and working abroad, including several of his former cabinet ministers. In response to such dissent, according to officials of several governments, Libyan "death squads" have murdered Gaddafi foes in Rome, Athens and London: Gaddafi's agents have been accused of masterminding the attempted assassination last October of Faisal Zagal-lai, 35, a Libyan student living in Colorado. Eugene Tafoya, a former U.S. Green Beret, has been charged with the shooting, which he denies. At home Gaddafi has little trouble stifling potential opposition, mostly by retaining iron control over his 45,000-man army. Concludes one State Department analyst: "He looks as though



The revolutionary leader delivering a fiery speech in the desert town of Sebha



Conferring good-naturedly in his study with Foreign Secretary Ali Treiki

